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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet suggests guidelines to follow for the selection, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals and volunteers in teaching reading and reading-related activities. The contents include: criteria by which paraprofessionals should be selected (emotional stability, ability to relate well to people, ethics, and formal and informal training); preservice and inservice training for paraprofessionals; skills and duties of the paraprofessional; and the evaluation of paraprofessionals and their effect on reading programs. (WR)

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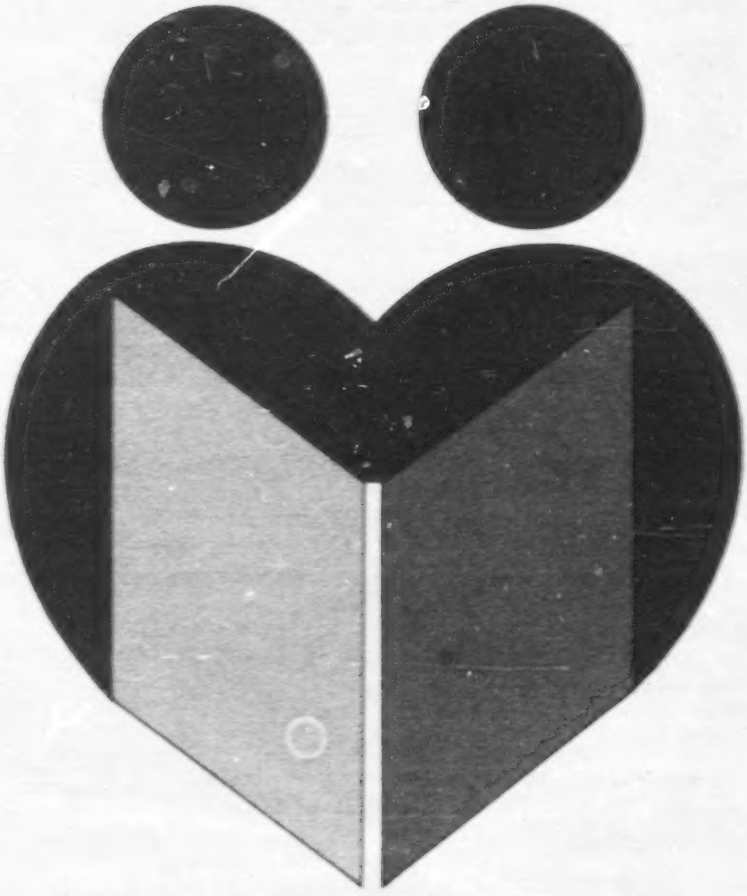

PARAPROFESSIONALS AND READING

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[redacted]LLITERACY in the United States is indeed a problem. From a variety of statistical information accumulated by the Office of Education regarding reading deficiencies throughout the United States, these shocking facts stand out: • One of every four students nationwide has significant reading deficiencies. • In large city school systems up to half of the students read below expectation. • There are more than 18.5 million functional illiterates in our adult population. • About half of the unemployed youth, ages 16-21, are functionally illiterate.

Another very disturbing and persisting reality in contemporary education is the fact that the academic achievement of minority group and lower-economic children in our public schools is consistently below norm. An obvious axiom is that without basic academic skills in reading, learning is virtually impossible.

One of the many proposed solutions to overcome the problems associated with the reading ability of our nation's youth has been to organize and mobilize additional personnel to assist in the reading programs of our children. The paraprofessional or volunteer tutor approach, as one of the means to overcome existing problems in the field of reading, has grown by leaps and bounds. Massive efforts by individual states, local communities and private organizations are now making significant headway in our nation's attempts to achieve the goal of maximal literacy levels for the United States.

In an address by the late United States Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen, Jr. before the 1969 Annual Convention of the National Association of State Boards of Education, he proclaimed that "we should immediately set for ourselves the goal of assuring that by the end of the 1970s the right to read shall be a reality for all—that no one shall be leaving our schools without the skill and the desire necessary to read to the full limits of his capability." He further proclaimed that "to achieve a goal of such enormous dimensions, involvement will have to reach far beyond the forces of education". Thus the call was made for a total national commitment to an involvement in the achievement of the right to read goal from the Congress; state and local political leaders and legislative bodies; business, industry and labor; civic and community groups; publishers, advertising organizations; television, radio and the press; research and scientific organizations; foundations; the entertainment industry; the sports world; and an enlightened and enthusiastic public.

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Central to the concept of the Right To Read effort is the active role of the private, the nonprofessional, sector of society. So great and difficult a goal as the complete elimination of reading failures demands a full marshalling of the vast resources outside the teaching profession—parents, other volunteers, youth, business and industry, public and private organizations.

In the modern context of paraprofessionals, the Bay City, Michigan experience of 1953, in response to overcrowded classrooms, is recognized as the formal beginning of paraprofessionals in the classroom. A National Education Association survey in 1966 indicated the use of 80,000 paraprofessionals in the United States; the Center for Urban Education gave a 1970 figure of 200,000 with a predicted figure of 1.5 million by 1977.

With such a vast number of paraprofessionals being used in the schools, in 1971 the Paraprofessionals and Reading Committee was charged by Theodore L. Harris, President of International Reading Association, to prepare guidelines for the selection, training and supervision of paraprofessionals in teaching reading and reading-related activities.

Two work sessions were held during 1971-1972; one was held in 1973. Combined with much correspondence, they resulted in the following guidelines designed to be helpful to those with responsibilities for the selecting, training and supervision of paraprofessionals and volunteers in teaching reading and reading-related activities.

Paraprofessionals and Reading Committee
International Reading Association
Marian L. Vick, Chairperson, North Carolina A&T State University
William J. Iverson, Board Liaison Representative, Stanford University
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Mary H. Purnell, State Department of Education, North Carolina
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Betty H. Yarborough, Old Dominion University
John Helfrich, National Reading Center
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CRITERIA by which a paraprofessional should be selected are similar to those used for teacher selection. A paraprofessional in reading is one who assumes a supportive role in the reading program. He or she will perform activities in the teaching-learning process under the supervision and guidance of a teacher or another professional. The paraprofessional may volunteer or receive pay for his services.

The paraprofessional should relate well to people. Since the paraprofessional meets and deals with many different individuals, he must be able to get along with others.

The paraprofessionnal should conform to standards of emotional stability and physical health as specified by the sponsoring agency. Good health and vitality are definitely prerequisites, as children often will be motivated to a greater degree when the individual giving his assistance is one who is vibrant in both action and attitude.

The paraprofessional in reading can accept the responsibilities of a continuing program for a reasonable length of time. Of great importance in a recruitment plan for paraprofessionals is the obligation on the part of the paraprofessional to devote regular and consistent amounts of personal time to the reading programs of both the teacher and the child.

The paraprofessional in reading must adhere to the rules and regulations of the sponsoring agency. Rules and regulations regarding personal conduct on the job should also be expected of the paraprofessional who is working in the same environment as the teacher.

The paraprofessional in reading must comply with the code of ethics of the teaching profession, particularly in matters dealing with confidential information. In planning and implementing programs for children in conjunction with the teacher, the paraprofessional is in many cases exposed to information that is to be held in strictest confidence. For this reason, professional loyalty to the teacher and child is expected.

The paraprofessional in reading must agree to participate in formal and informal training sessions related to assigned duties. The strength of any program involving paraprofessionals in reading will be directly related to the amount and types of pre-assignment training and later inservice training that they receive.

TRAINING for paraprofessionals, both pre and inservice, should include several areas. The degree of emphasis placed on each of these areas is dependent on the backgrounds of those paraprofessionals in training. A major component of the training program involves task orientation.

A reading paraprofessional is trained according to the tasks to be performed in the context of the goals and objectives of the sponsoring agency. The orientation phase should acquaint the individual with the interrelationships in the organizational structure. The training phase should include instruction in the scope and details of the basic tasks to be performed while giving service to the organization.

The goal of orientation is to develop productive paraprofessionals who can work with other people in a cooperative, considerate and responsible way. Basic components in the paraprofessional's orientation: 1) background information about the agency itself; 2) the purpose and objectives of the agency and its role in the community; 3) the administrative structure relating the governing body to staff, to the public, to tutees and to the paraprofessional; 4) personnel policies relating to procedures and regulations that will pertain to the paraprofessional—insurance, safety, parking, coffee breaks, lunchroom facilities and equipment he may be using; and 5) rules and regulations pertaining to the paraprofessional and an interpretation of his duties, rights and role.

The orientation phase of the training provides an excellent opportunity for the trainer to emphasize to trainees that, regardless of the level of their prior preparation and experience, they are to assume a supportive role to the professional in the teaching-learning situation and that the major responsibility for directing and supervising the educational program rests with the instructional leader, who will most often be a classroom teacher.

Specifically, the paraprofessional will be expected to understand his role. The new paraprofessional's first interests are primarily about what kind of job he will be doing in what kind of climate and what the benefits of his help and time will be. Good orientation should be developed around these concerns. Since the paraprofessional may be operating in a rather limited sphere once he begins to give service, it may be useful to include as many people who are participating in other aspects of the mission as possible in orientation activities.

In school projects, the principal, the counselor, the school nurse, and others, may all participate in giving depth and breadth to the paraprofessional's understanding of the setting in which he will be operating. Each of these other people should have an opportunity to define his role in the total program, thus giving the paraprofessional a better perspective of the role he is expected to fulfill.

Some basic information related to the sociological and psychological implications of learning and, in particular, learning to read should be considered. Basic information about the reading process or processes should be shared with the paraprofessional in training. Various checklists and demonstration approaches related to information concerning the reading skills appropriate for the paraprofessional's assigned child or group should be available. Materials and equipment that the trainee will be expected to use should be explained. Basic information about the teacher's personal instructional techniques and basic approaches to reading should also be explained.

The paraprofessional deserves information about any social and environmental factors which may tend to influence the learning situation significantly. Among these may be considerations having to do with ethnicity; socioeconomic levels of tutees; community attitudes toward the organization which the paraprofessional will be serving; the general pattern of discipline within the school or other learning situations. It is very important that the paraprofessional be made to realize that these things must be considered in the successful execution of his duties. In the orientation program, special effort should be made to help the trainee communicate with and relate to the people in the setting in which he will be operating. This is especially necessary when paraprofessionals are working in situations or with people with whom they may be unfamiliar. Of course, it is not suggested that a whole course in human relations be offered. Yet, the trainee should receive some guidance in concepts of human relations and strategies appropriate to the situation in which he is to function.

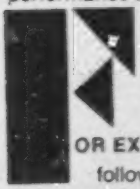
Paraprofessionals should be taught to approach their duties with open minds, to be sensitive and to sense frustration. They should be warned against the dangers of shock and disappointment when they encounter resentment. They may need help in dealing with people as individuals.

Information should be given to the paraprofessional concerning the hows and whys of cooperative planning that will be necessary. It is very desirable that the teacher who is working directly with the paraprofessional be involved in the training of the paraprofessional who will work with her. Efforts must be made to match teachers and paraprofessionals who can work harmoniously. When there is

concerted effort by the teacher and paraprofessional in the training process, the role and capabilities of the paraprofessional will be mutually understood. Because of the supportive role and concept of the paraprofessional in reading, he should be limited to performing only those tasks for which he is specifically trained.

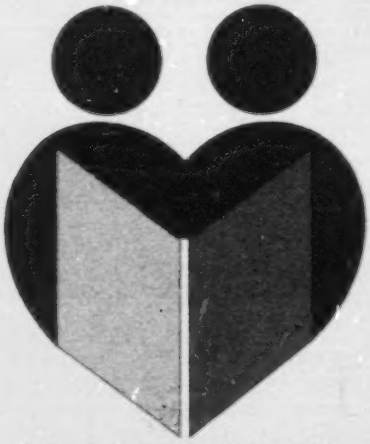
KILLS, duties, the range of tasks a reading paraprofessional may perform should be identified by the local agency according to the needs of that agency and the competencies of the trainee. Paraprofessionals, depending on their background of education and experience and their facility for learning new things, may be trained to participate in any or all aspects of the reading program as long as there is an understanding that their role is one of support and not leadership.

Administration of standardized and informal diagnostic tests, grading of tests, compilation of weaknesses as revealed by errors on tests, practice and reinforcement of skills introduced and developed by the teacher, construction and management of reading practice games and devices, and many other activities which need to be done in a classroom can be objectives for training of and performance by the reading paraprofessional.



OR EXAMPLE, a paraprofessional might carry out any of the following tasks: *Implementation of instruction* 1) Provides practice experiences of many types for individual pupils or groups (flash card drills, comprehension checks, workbook assignments, and so forth), 2) Provides individual assistance to pupils who need clarification of directions and other types of assistance as they work, 3) Reads to pupils, 4) Monitors or supervises students engaged in an activity initiated by the teacher, and 5) Assists pupils engaged in independent activities (learning packs, programed materials and the like); *Assessment of pupil progress* 1) Assists in monitoring test activities, 2) Renders individual assistance to pupils with special needs during testing sessions, 3) Assists the teacher with the mechanics of scoring, 4) Records test results, and 5) Compiles weaknesses as revealed by errors on tests.

EVALUATION of paraprofessionals and their effect on reading programs is equally important to their selection and training. The instructional leader in a school has the responsibility of establishing an effective program for evaluating paraprofessionals. A major portion of the evaluation of paraprofessionals is conducted by the teacher with whom the paraprofessional works. Seminars in which administrators, supervisors, teachers, and paraprofessionals determine the evaluative criteria should be initiated. The utilization of rating scales should be created cooperatively by the teacher and paraprofessional if this approach is used. The evaluation aspects should consist of evaluating those skills that can be easily monitored and also the skills so desired in the recruitment of individuals.



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